

THE CRITIC.

BY GEOFFREY JUVENAL, ESQ.

No. VII.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 1820.

“———— de duro est ultima ferro.” Ov. MET.

No satirical assault upon the folly and extravagance of the day was ever crowned with more perfect and lasting success than the inimitable and immortal work of Cervantes. From the blissful days when I greedily devoured it as authentic biography, to the present hour, it has always given me fresh delight to mount *en croupe* with the noble Manchegan, to witness his combats, listen to his inspiring harangues, share his dignified courtesy, and find my heart warmed and elevated by the generous and magnanimous sentiments with which his discourses abound. Very rarely, except in scenes of the most grotesque misapprehension, have I been able to carry with me the idea of the Don's madness—so manly and correct are all his views and intentions, except when hurried into ridiculous action by his solitary foible. And yet, in later years,

when my enthusiastic admiration of literary excellence yields, in a certain degree, to prudential considerations, I often doubt whether the effect of this book has not been infinitely greater than was ever expected or intended by its author. When he attacked the puerile taste of his countrymen for romances of knight-errantry, and exhibited in such bold relief, at the same moment, the noble and the paltry features of chivalry—he could not have believed that his censure would inflict a mortal wound upon the fabric, and consign to indiscriminate ruin the excellencies and defects of the whole system. Yet such, it seems to me, has been the operation of his writings. This may be thought by some, a whim of my own. Yet few will deny that high chivalric honour and courtesy have nearly vanished, or, at least, that they are rapidly verging to total extinction. The civil and military intercourse of nations, in our own day, would furnish a copious list of examples.

But with such lofty deeds, I have no immediate concern. My authority does not extend to them.—*En passant*, however, I may be permitted to remark (and it is far from being irrelevant to the subject before me) that the very country that produced the immortal work to which I have reference, was once justly considered the appropriate land of high soul'd honour—the home of every great and

generous sentiment. Once the impress of her coin bore the fame of the Monarchy to the farthest horde of Tartars—the terror of her arms efficiently seconded the logic of her ambassadors, and the wealth of her exchequer alarmed every calculating chieftain of Europe. Nay—the untameable spirit of youthful liberty—that Antæus gathering new strength from successive prostrations—shrunk before the dread of her captains. Alva deluged the plains of Holland with the blood of her brave, before she could shake off the yoke of Spanish Tyranny. Let an impartial man now search the civilized world, and investigate the diplomatic intercourse of the least polished and virtuous states—and then point me to one more sunk in effeminacy and meanness, more grievously degenerated from the magnanimous opinions and conduct of the brave and gallant Castilians, than this same birth place of Don Miguel de Cervantes—this cradle of liberal and generous chivalry. What beggarly evasion in finance—what destructive delay of justice—cowardice in arms—imbecility in government, and piteous degradation of Royalty, is not to be found in this land, which, in former days, plumed itself above all the world, on its wealth, bravery, talents and grandeur? Numerous moral and physical causes, have conspired to produce these lamentable results, but some part of this degeneracy is fairly imputable to the irresistible assault of this Spanish wit.

Chivalric honour had surely perished and a hideous iron age commenced, when the gang of Pilnitz formed their felonious league—when the youthful Bourbon was murdered in cold blood, for asserting a right enjoyed immemorially by his forefathers.

Princes may unite to plunder the weak in a species of royal highway robbery; and sovereign states may negotiate like horse jockeys—they are amenable only to the “ultima ratio regum”—my concern is with individuals; and my *criticism* is exercised on humbler, though not less interesting offences.

I lament, and nightly mourn upon my solitary pillow, that every thing like heroic generosity seems to have fled from the friendship, love, marriage, and general manners, of modern times. The natural selfishness of man, which was constantly repressed, as dishonourable to every true and gallant knight, now predominates, and seems almost the sole rule of action. Friendships are formed among the youthful from sameness of tastes in particular species of idleness or debauchery; and as easily relinquished when these cease to amuse, or for any equally good reason—they originate among men of mature years from motives of convenience or interest, and are uniformly considered subordinate to such views by all who would avoid an imputation of insanity. Love arises, in the present improved state of the world, not from any con-

viction of superior beauty or excellence in the object, or from the possession of estimable qualities of mind. All the nobler emotions of the soul are subjected to a spirit of calculation; and any mortal who, like myself, should dare to speak of disinterested friendship, of love without wealth, or any of the chimeras of ancient romance, might expect an immediate passport to bedlam. Modern marriage speculations are dangerous subjects for any writer of feeling to interfere with, who would preserve his page unsullied. But it is in the general intercourse and manners of society that the loss of chivalric feeling and courtesy is most to be lamented.

It is a received maxim that the female sex gives the tone to manners. This sounds well, but unfortunately, like many phrases in common use, it has no practical meaning.—The influence of women in society has been diminishing for the last century; and the character of a true and gallant knight, is so rare among the beaux of the present day, that the ladies of the Republic will soon find it necessary, like their predecessors of the classic ages, to retire to the bosom of their families, and be unknown beyond the walls of their kitchens.

In the midst of Athenian glory in arts and arms—among a people who denounced all other nations as barbarians, Woman held the place of a domestic menial—an inferior order

of creation—imperiously excluded from the communion of her *rational* lords and masters.—The noblest faculties of the human mind—the sweetest emotions of the heart in the Grecian mythology, were deified and adored in *female forms*; while their only lawful representatives in real life, the true Muses and Graces of elegance and tenderness—were scornfully rejected as unmeaning toys, or humbled to the rank of lowly Helots. The Roman matron filled a nobler office. She was *permitted* to form the minds of her offspring, to infuse into their youthful souls the spirit of the age, and to urge them onward in the path of glory, by recounting the gallant exploits of their ancestors. But she was doomed to perpetual exclusion from the society of those she had formed.—She was never cheered or excited by the observation or applause of her fellow citizens—solitary and unknown, she wanted a powerful incentive to duty—was denied the richest reward of meritorious actions—the notice and admiration of the learned and virtuous.

The sex should then preserve in hallowed remembrance the spring of their greatness and favour—the generous age of Chivalry. The moving principle of that system was entire devotion to the fair—a complete surrender of every rude feeling and passion at their shrine.—No enterprise was too difficult—no sacrifice too great—no subjection too ge-

neral, to gain the favour and good will of these objects of earthly worship. Toils, dangers, privations and suffering were of no estimation, when rewarded by the approving smile of a beloved mistress.—Her colours excited to deeds of “high emprise” in the field—her presence called into action the knightly elegance and manly courtesy of the “bower and hall,” and her applause bore the balm of consolation to her dying champion.

This system accomplished for the female world what all the polish of Greece and Rome had denied them. For excessive and puerile as this adoration may now appear, the ladies at least should remember, that they are indebted to the small remnant of this spirit, seconded by the humanizing influence of Christianity, for the rank which they now hold.

It is therefore in the treatment, the respect, attention and regard for Woman, the ornament and blessing of this life, the soother of woes, the partner of our joys and griefs, that this improvement in manners is most clearly perceptible. That husbands and brothers should treat their wives and sisters with rude indifference, and feel themselves degraded by any show of affectionate care, is too well established by omnipotent custom to be wondered at; much as I have puzzled myself to account for this seeming anomaly, or to discover the *rationale* of the mode—I am now

satisfied that it must be founded in reason—and it would savour of antiquated prejudice on my part, to object to an arrangement so universally sanctioned. But the said husbands and brothers must not overwhelm me with maxims of modern wisdom, or turn me back to my romances, when I loudly protest against their lounging indifference—their rude neglect—their boisterous merriment—their boorish buffoonery or stupid vacancy when in the company of the fair, who are not under the ban of any relationship.—It is their duty and interest, and it ought to be their pride, to cherish, protect, and cheer those whom Providence has made dependent upon them, and at the same time, enabled to return with tenfold interest all the kindness and favours that man can confer on them.—In this duty the noble heroes of chivalry have nothing to blush for in comparison with their semi-animated successors. Don Miguel did the world poor service in banishing such sentiments from the code of modern honour; and I, old as I am, will support the truth of these remarks against any knight of the present day, who dares to deny them.

, O.